



Adult Mental Health Division

Dual Diagnosis

English



What is Dual Diagnosis?

A dual diagnosis means a person has both a mental illness and an alcohol or drug problem. These conditions occur together frequently. Trying to manage just one of these problems can be extremely stressful. Add to the mix multiple symptoms that overlap and hide the ability to make a diagnosis, and what you are left with is a challenge to find a good treatment. To achieve the best possible outcome, both disorders must be treated at the same time because it effects all aspects of the individual's life and greatly increases their risk for more problems if left untreated.

Dual Diagnosis in Your Culture

If your culture has a way of understanding mental illness and drug use that is different from what is presented here, please tell your doctor, nurse, or case manager so that we know from your point of view how drug use and mental illness are understood, the cultural healers in your community, and the treatments from your cultural or spiritual background. Also if you want an interpreter to help you in talking to your doctor, just let your case manager know and one will be provided at no cost to you.

Which problem came first, the mental illness or the drug problem?

Often the mental health problem occurs first. In an attempt to feel better the individual uses drugs or alcohol which then leads to dependency. In other cases, the alcohol or drug problem is the first condition which over time then leads to depression, anxiety and more severe emotional and mental problems. Regardless of the cause, the first step to

living a more healthy life is to cleanse your system of the substances. Ideally, detoxification, especially with alcohol and substances, should take place under medical supervision and the process can last from a few days to more than a week, depending on what drugs the person used and for how long.

Dual Diagnosis is also called...

Co-morbid disorders

Co-morbidity

Co-occurring disorders

Concurrent disorders

Dually diagnosed

Multiple disorders

Data on Dual Diagnosis

About 50% of individuals with severe mental disorders are affected by substance problems.

16% of jail and prison inmates are estimated to have severe mental and substance problems.

The difficulty in Identifying Dual Diagnosis

Dual diagnosis can be difficult to identify because the symptoms of one disorder often look like the symptoms of the other disorder. Many of the symptoms of drug abuse, such as extreme *anxiety*, *depression*, *paranoia*, *delusions* and *hallucinations* are similar to symptoms of mental illness. The impact that the symptoms have on a person's life causing severe decline in self-care and functioning can also be a symptom of a mental health problem.

The families of people with a mental illness and the professionals who treat these cases can easily underestimate the severity of the person's problem with drugs or alcohol for several reasons: drug abusers can use substances without their families knowing; the behavioral signs of drug use look like the signs of a mental illness; it may be difficult to separate the two; and it takes time to unravel the interacting effects of substance abuse and mental illness.

Evaluation

A good evaluation will include a complete history of symptoms -- when they started, how long they have lasted, how severe they are, whether the person had them before and, if so, whether the symptoms were treated and what treatment was given. In addition, since commonly abused drugs may cause symptoms resembling mental illness urine samples from the person can be tested at hospitals or physicians' offices for the presence of these drugs. The doctor will also ask if the person has thoughts about death or suicide.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) came out with an assessment process that you should receive leading up to your treatment planning. The steps your case manager should follow include: Identify & gather additional information; Check for dual diagnosis; Determine which agency will assume primary case management (mental health or substance abuse division); Determine the type of care; Determine diagnosis; Determine disability

& impairment; Identify strengths & supports; Identify cultural & linguistic needs & supports; Identify problem domains; Determine stage of change; and Plan for your treatment.

The Hope: Treatment Choice

Today more programs are being developed to treat both disorders together which are the optimal way to treat dual diagnosis. When a team approach is used, chances for recovery improve instilling more hope and optimism for the families and those suffering from two disorders.

In addition, patient and family education about dual diagnosis, its symptoms, and the medications being prescribed to treat the illness is an important part of the treatment process and helps support the family and informal networks.

Keep in mind that treatments from your cultural or spiritual background, such as prayer or a specific cultural practice could also be considered. For more information about dual diagnosis, contact a mental health clinic near you.